

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Carol C. Lam***

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***For Immediate Release***

**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** - September 10, 2004

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced that United States District Court Judge Napoleon A. Jones, Jr. today sentenced Jose Antonio Vasquez-Villasenor in federal district court in San Diego to serve a prison term of 57 months for his role in smuggling a group of undocumented aliens whose apprehension led to the death of James Paul Epling, an agent with the Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Customs and Border Protection.

As part of his guilty plea on April 30, 2004, before the same court, defendant Vasquez-Villasenor admitted that he and another individual attempted to smuggle a group of five Chinese nationals into Arizona by crossing the treacherous Colorado River during the evening of December 16, 2003. During the course of the apprehension and rescue of the group, Agent Epling, then 24 years of age, died of apparent drowning.

United States Attorney Lam noted, “No prison term can possibly compensate for the loss of a life, in this case that of a dedicated law enforcement officer. However, this prosecution and sentence reflect this office’s commitment to aggressively prosecute smugglers who care more about money than about the lives they put in peril. Our hearts go out to the family of Agent Epling, who gave his life so that others might be spared.”

## **DEFENDANT**

JOSE ANTONIO VASQUEZ-VILLASENOR

## **SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Bringing in illegal alien resulting in death in violation of Title 8, United States Code, Section 1324(a)(1)(A), (v)(II) and (a)(1)(B)(iv) and Aiding and Abetting.

## **SENTENCE**

57 months’ custody; 5 years’ supervised release; \$100 penalty assessment

## **AGENCIES**

Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, Yuma Sector  
Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, El Centro Sector  
Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Diego Division, El Centro Resident Agency  
Federal Bureau of Investigation, Phoenix Division, Yuma Resident Agency  
Yuma County Sheriff’s Office  
Imperial County Sheriff’s Office  
Yuma City Fire Department  
Cocopah Police Department  
San Bernardino Sheriff’s Office  
Rural/Metro Fire Department, Yuma  
United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation  
United States Marine Corps, Air Station Yuma  
Maricopa County Medical Examiner and Forensic Science Center  
Grupo Beta, Mexicali, Baja California  
Mexican Immigration, San Luis, Sonora, Mexico  
Baja State Judicial Police  
Mexicali Police Department  
Mexicali Fire and Rescue  
Consulate for the Republic of Mexico